

A Glossary of Britishisms for American Readers

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BRITISH ENGLISH v. AMERICAN ENGLISH

It's extraordinary how few differences there are between the 'standard' forms of British & American English, even after a separation of two and a half centuries across the expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. True, there's always been plenty of exchange between us: literature, theatre, films, popular music, academic research, etc. But even so, it's quite amazing that the match is still almost perfect. Fortunately, very few people nowadays would argue that one version is 'better' than the other. In general, the British & American variants are treated as equal alternatives (alongside, for example, Australian English).

SPELLINGS

There are some (not many) divergences in the way that Brits & Americans write the English language. Here are a few examples:

analyse = analyze
anaesthetic = anesthetic
diarrhoea = diarrhea
driving licence/offence = driving license/offense
foetal = fetal
fulfil/fulfilment = fulfill/fulfillment
judgement = judgment
metre/centre/spectre = meter/center/specter
to practise/some practice = to practice/some practice
rancour/humour/colour = rancor/humor/color
reveller/revelled = reveler/reveled
sceptic/sceptical = skeptic/skeptical
traveller/travelled = traveler/traveled

VOCABULARY, SLANG & IDIOMS

The version of English I've adopted in *The Seven Symphonies: A Finnish Murder Mystery* is, not surprisingly, British — being British born and educated myself; also because every English-speaking character in the novel is of British origin: Nick, Miranda & Rosie (directly or by parentage Welsh), Adrian & Phillip (English), and Niall (Northern Irish). In the dialogue especially, there are a number of 'local' words and expressions that might be unfamiliar to American readers. I've listed below as many as I'm aware of for your reference. If you notice any other items that need explaining, please e-mail me (simon.boswell@siba.fi), and I'll add them to the list:

articulated lorry = truck with two-sections linked by a pivotal joint
banged up = put in prison
bits of stuff = sexy young women
blinder = blinding (very painful) headache
bloke = guy (always male)
Brahms & Liszt = pissed (ie drunk): *Cockney rhyming slang*
brass monkeys = *reference to a slang expression about the weather: "It's cold enough to freeze the balls (testicles) off a brass monkey!"*
broadsheet = large-format newspaper (*eg Herald Tribune*)

carzey = john, bathroom
catch somebody out = notice somebody's attempts at hiding their mistakes or dishonesty
char = tea
cheeky = disrespectful, shameless
ciggys = cigarette
cracker = extremely attractive woman
cutie = cute, attractive young woman
dishy = highly attractive, sexy
do = party, social gathering
do a flit = leave without explanation
do a runner = leave suddenly, escape, run away
dwell on something = think (or worry) very much about something
fob somebody off = discourage an approach by somebody (with excuses or lies)
fruitcake = nutcase, madman
gag for something = be desperate to get something *especially* sexual satisfaction
gen = information (*short for* general information)
give something a miss = not bother with (doing) something
graft = hard work
jolly along = encourage in a cheerful way
Jolly hockey sticks! : (*old-fashioned*) *supposedly upper-class schoolgirl's expression* = "How nice!" [*Nowadays used sarcastically.*]
knocking shop = brothel
lads = guys (male only)
letch after = lust after, desire sexually
loo (*widely used polite slang*) = Am. washroom
loony = crazy person
lose one's rag = lose one's temper
mash = mashed potatoes
muck-stirring = spreading malicious gossip
muddle through = manage somehow in spite of difficulties
nasty piece of work = cruel and vindictive person
nipper = small child
outhouse = Am. outbuilding, ie a detached structure from the main one
peckish = a bit hungry
pinch = steal
pissed = drunk >> "pissed as wombats" = extremely drunk: *Phillip's personal variation on the common expression "pissed as rats"*
poky = lacking in space, claustrophobic
prezzie (*written as 'PREZY' in phone SMS*) = a present, a gift
prise open = carefully force open, pry open
punter = customer
running trots = acute diarrhoea
scatty = absentminded, empty-headed, flighty
scuzzy = untidy, old and/or dirty
secateurs = strong scissors-like tool used by gardeners for pruning (cutting) bushes and trees
smallholding = very small farm
smug bugger = irritatingly smug person
snog = heavy kissing session
sodding = [*a mild swear word*] annoying
spotted dick = name of an English sponge pudding containing raisins
suss something out = realize the truth or the meaning of something

tatty = in bad condition

the pools = large-scale organized gambling which involves guessing the results of coming football matches

tipping down = raining heavily

tiz-woz >> in a tiz-woz = confused, anxious, overexcited

topped = killed, murdered

tosser = stupid, worthless person = *Am.* jerk

trolleybus = bus taking power from overhead electric cables

turn over (a room/home/office) = break in and steal valuables, *probably* leaving the place in a mess

veg out = spend time doing nothing useful, being lazy

watering hole = (*early 20th century slang*) pub or similar drinking place

wimpy = weak and unassertive

wind somebody up = intentionally try to annoy or panic somebody

Y-fronts = an old-fashioned style of men's underpants popular in Britain in the 1960s (or thereabouts)